RUSKIN'S IDEAS ON EDUCATION IN RELATION TO TWENTIETH CENTURY EDUCATIONAL REFORM

BY

FRANK WARREN CLIPPINGER

A. B., Wabash College, 1916
M. A., University of Illinois, 1917

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RUSKIN'S IDEAS ON EDUCATION IN RELATION TO TWENTIETH CENTURY EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Like many another Victorian man of letters, John Ruskin devoted his art in large measure to the social problems of the day. A precocious study of nature was expanded to include a study of the fine arts; the resultant theory of art grew into a theory of political economy, which in turn led to the utopian dream of the Guild of St. George.

Chief among many interests related to Ruskin's conception of the place of art in life was education; it became one of the principal means by which he would establish a perfected social order. His conception of the nature and function of education was formulated early, when he was little more than thirty years old; and it was characteristic of his genius that later exposition of his ideas was but amplification of his original point of view. Significant it is, too, that throughout his life education became a subject of increasing interest, and that this interest was reflected in his writings. From 1853 onward he maintained almost unbroken contact, as teacher and patron, with a wide variety of educational institutions, private and public, elementary and advanced. When, in 1870, he was made Professor of Art at Oxford, he looked upon that appointment as an event in his life almost as momentous as was the publication of *Unto This Last.* Thenceforward all his energies were directed to bringing the many facets of his life-work to bear upon educational objectives.

Ruskin made no formal statement of a theory of education. His views were expressed in incomplete sketches and in brief, sometimes casual comments scattered throughout his writings on other topics. His ideas are frequently phrased in an arresting manner, but their meaning is often dependent upon an understanding of the author's social idealism and of his temperament. Examination of these comments reveals, however, that they were related in his mind to a consistent and, in his opinion, practical scheme of education.

It is the purpose of this study, first, to set forth, as has not yet been done, the whole of Ruskin's thought on education, embodying, as completely as Ruskin expressed them, his conception of the function of education, the principles governing instruction, the organization and content of the plan by which he would achieve his objectives. In addition, we have made a comparison of Ruskin's ideas on education with those which currently express the spirit of educational reform in America, primarily with the hope that such comparison will add to our understanding of Ruskin.

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Ruskin's social idealism has its roots deeply embedded in a religious faith which he had absorbed in earliest childhood. Maturity and expanding knowledge did not change its fundamental assumptions: a beneficient, paternal God; an ordered universe governed by God's cosmic law; thinking Man, the central object of creation, endowed with a moral faculty by which he becomes capable of love for God and His handiwork and of recognizing his own place in the universal plan. That religious faith was the inspiration for all Ruskin's study, of nature, of art, of political economy. It dyed indelibly his conception of education.

Ruskin's plan of education was built upon several basic educational principles. The first of these was repeated at every opportunity with all the emphasis he could command: *All education must be moral first.** Education must form character; beyond everything else it must establish in every individual the "law of rightness in human conduct." The moral virtues which Ruskin would emphasize are the ones which the world has been least willing to put into general daily practice. These to Ruskin were but practical application of the altruism embodied in Christian ethics: humility, gentleness, compassion, reverence, and obedience. He found in them, however, a dynamic force much greater than is conventionally ascribed to them.

The second of Ruskin's principles is contained in the state-

**Fors Clavigera,* 67 (July, 1876), sec. 19. *Works of John Ruskin,* Library Edition, XXVIII, p. 655. All subsequent references are to this edition.

ment: *The essential foundation of education is to be skill in some useful labour.** It is in work that man finds his most substantial happiness, though it must be work which exercises all of a man, head, heart, and hand combined, and it must be truly useful. Therefore, the core of the school program would be such basic occupational activities as gardening, carpentry, weaving, and sewing. One of its purposes would be to discover the capacities and aptitudes with which the child is endowed at birth. Through the disciplines of the school these potentialities would be developed and the child would be prepared to take that place in the social order for which he is by nature best fitted. Moreover, training in vocational skills and knowledge is an important support to moral education, for "it is physically impossible that true religious knowledge, or pure morality, should exist among any classes of a nation who do not work with their hands for their bread."*

Another principle is that *the school must teach "the laws of health and the exercises enjoined by them."** The habit of cleanliness would be insisted upon, and physical development would be encouraged in connection with the various activities of the school program. Ruskin had no interest in gymnastic exercises. Recreational games might be played, but these should be non-competitive and should have some instructive objective. Better than games would be such exercises as riding and sailing, which bring the individual into companionship "with the wild natural elements" and with animals.

The most unconventional of Ruskin's ideas, and yet an eminently characteristic one, is his insistence upon the necessity of keeping clearly in mind the end or use of knowledge. "The great leading error of modern times is the mistaking erudition for education." *"Intellectual education before,—much more without,—moral education is in completeness impossible; and in incompleteness, a calamity."** Even the intellectual skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic should be restricted to those

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**Fors Clavigera,* 9 (September, 1871), sec. 2. XXVII, p. 147.
**Fors Clavigera,* 67 (July, 1876), sec. 18. XXVIII, p. 654.
**Unto This Last,* sec. 6. XVII, pp. 27-8.
**Fors Clavigera,* 67 (July, 1876), sec. 19. XXVIII, p. 655.

who show ability to use them properly; consequently, they would not be taught formally in the elementary school.

There is, of course, a certain minimum body of knowledge which should be taught to all; but it would be limited to those elements and first principles which the learner can immediately put to use. What children cannot apply they should not be troubled to know.

Thus Ruskin worked upon the principle that *the child, and not the subject-matter, is to be the real focus of attention.* One of the obligations of education is to discover what capacities the individual may possess. But capacities differ; there is no such thing as equality. "No training, no forming, nor informing, will ever make two persons alike in thought and power."* Beginning with the simpler types of occupational activity, the training of each individual would progress to finer and more specialized forms until he has discovered both what he can do best and that which he is not fitted to do. And so progress would be measured largely on the basis of individual standards . Examinations, while necessary, should be considered only as means by which the pupil discovers his own true position and powers in the world.

Moreover, *no compulsion, especially in intellectual education, is possible.* External stimuli of either reward or punishment are forbidden, and competition in school, as in economic life, is to be recognized as entirely evil. In education no stimuli are possible except those which accompany moral development.

Too often Ruskin's brief comments, taken by themselves, reveal only partially the substance of his educational purpose. Especially is this true of his intentionally provocative assertions in respect to the place of intellectual education. Actually, he would include in his program most of the conventional "subjects" of instruction; in many instances, however, he had very unconventional ideas about how they should be treated. His attitude toward the various branches of knowledge can best be expressed by grouping them, as did Ruskin, according to the "three great

Stones of Venice, Vo. III, app. 7. XI, p. 260.

occupations of men," art, science, and literature.

"Art gives Form to knowledge and Grace to utility."* It makes visible things which otherwise could neither be described nor remembered; it gives delightfulness and worth to the implements of daily use. It can have a place in education, therefore, as in life, as an elevating influence which works through all parts of the environment and through every activity. Ruskin would use every means at his disposal to teach by aid of the eye, "a nobler organ than the ear," through use of drawings, charts, and photographs. Every school would have, as one of its most important forms of equipment, its own small museum of art and natural history.

Ruskin had great confidence in the possibilities of the museum as a means of imparting knowledge, in school and university, in village and city. But it must be a place for serious study, containing relatively few items, each the best of its kind and in its natural condition, representative of familiar rather than strange subjects. To the establishment of museums Ruskin devoted some of the best and most successful efforts of his life.

In conformity with his larger view of the place of art in life, however, Ruskin had no interest in teaching artistic expression as a subject in its own right. He would teach simple drawing, but only as a means of obtaining and communicating knowledge. "He who can accurately represent the form of an object, and match its colour, has unquestionably a power of notation and description greater in most instances than that of words."*

Ruskin found in choral music, as did the Greeks, a means of education which combined physical, intellectual, and moral education. And in the same spirit of emulation of Plato, Ruskin would include worshipful dancing. It is apparent, however, that he had no clear idea about how to bring dancing into his program. There would also be instruction in speaking, confined chiefly to what is best described by the term, oral composition, and to recitation of Bible passages and poetry.

Ruskin was rather violently opposed to the trend of scientific

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*_Lectures on Art_, sec. 97. XX, p. 95.
*_A Joy for Ever_, sec. 153. XVI, p. 143.

research of his own time because, it seemed to him, it pursued knowledge for its own sake, forgetting that knowledge is of value only as it serves practically the spiritual and material well-being of mankind. The man of science uses his energies to better advantage if they are spent not in the discovery of new facts but in gaining a proper grasp of facts already known.

He therefore had little use for such physical sciences as chemistry and "anatomy." He was, however, greatly interested in natural history, and would give to the study of this subject a high place in education, especially at the elementary level. "I think the vital and joyful study of natural history quite the principal element requiring introduction, not only into University, but into national education, from highest to lowest."* "Rightly comprehended, half of schooling consists of making children familiar with natural objects, and the other half in teaching the practice of piety towards them (piety meaning kindness to living things and orderly use of the lifeless)."*

In such statements spoke the artist and the deeply religious man. The practical study of natural history gains for man control over the sources of food and shelter, knowledge of the materials with which man needs must work; but it also deals with things as God made them, in all their natural beauty and in their living condition. Moreover, it has a high moral value, for to Ruskin a sympathetic understanding of man's natural environment is the first step on the road to a knowledge of God. As he had written in *Modern Painters*,* "The one who loves Nature most will be always found to have more faith in God than the other. For nature-worship brings with it a sense of the presence and power of a Great Spirit as no mere reasoning can either induce or controvert; and where that nature-worship is innocently pursued . . . it becomes the channel of certain sacred truths, which by no other means can be conveyed."

And so Ruskin desired his pupils to study "botany," but to him botany meant "teaching children the beauty of plants as they grow," "their biographies—how and where they live and

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Lectures on Art, sec. 23. XX, p. 35.
Fors Clavigera, 95 (October, 1884), sec. 4. XXIX, p. 495.
Modern Painters, V, pp. 377-8.

die, their tempers, benevolences, distresses, and virtues." Similarly, in "zoology" he would take the greatest pains to get at the creature's habits of life and know its "talents." He would have the pupils know enough astronomy to follow the stars in their courses.

Such knowledge is not gained in a laboratory; it comes from developing the habit of accurate and sympathetic observation of living things in their natural condition.

In Ruskin's scale of 'sciences,' a knowledge of human nature ranks higher than a knowledge of natural things. Such knowledge is to be acquired through literature and history. Properly understood, history deals with the record of households, not of wars. "Literature does its duty in raising our fancy to the height of what may be noble, honest, and felicitous in actual life"* and in giving us the companionship of the greatest men of all times. The greater the art, however, the greater its power for evil, when corrupted; and so Ruskin strove to reserve literary knowledge for those whose moral strength and whose sensitivity to the finer aspects of human nature had been sufficiently developed to permit them to make proper use of it. In the elementary school he would not teach reading; it was possible that a pupil might meet all his elementary requirements without the use of books. For in the earlier stages of education, when dealing with a yet unselected body of pupils, Ruskin relied upon direct contact with things and the oral instruction of the teacher. The teacher would read to the pupils daily. What is read may be fact or fiction, history or romance, but it should be set before them only the "most worthy in human deeds and human passion." However, those who of their own accord might choose to learn to read would find available in the school library a supply of the best books. And it is to be noted that Ruskin was rather extravagantly optimistic about the amount of literature and history he expected his pupils to know.

Nowhere did Ruskin outline his whole program or attempt to show the relation of its parts, but when these parts are brought together we find that they fit with rather surprising consistency

**Eagle's Nest*, sec. 206. XXII, pp. 263-4.

into a pattern consisting of universal elementary training and a variety of forms of advanced and specialized training for those who are capable of receiving it.

In its beginnings elementary education would be universally compulsory, but beyond the initial stages continuation of schooling would depend upon the pupil. Ruskin's plan was so arranged that a gradual sifting of the coarser elements would take place without disturbance either to the pupil or to society, because from first to last education deals with skills and knowledge in relation to their use. We see this practical aspect of Ruskin's thought in all his ideas. Schools would be small. Occupational activities would be suited to the environment, whether it be city, country-side, or sea-coast.

Each school would be equipped with library and a reading room, perhaps better called a "listening room." There would be a laboratory for purposes of demonstration which would also be the school museum. There would be shops, always a carpenter's shop, perhaps a potter's, and more, if possible. And "each school would have garden, playground, and cultivable land around it spacious enough to employ the scholars in fine weather mostly out of doors."

It is impossible to determine the actual program of a day in Ruskin's elementary school, but it would be composed of the following exercises. There would be morning and evening worship services for the spiritual experience derived from choral singing which exalts the deeds of noble persons. There would be instruction in singing, dancing, speaking, and drawing. The last of these would be in relation to exercises in geography, astronomy, and natural history; but it would occupy as much of the day as would singing. Some time would be spent in the study of natural history through the medium of drawings and specimens in the museum. For an hour the teacher would read stories to those who cared to listen. During the larger part of the day the children would be busy in fields and shops. Here in addition to developing practical skills, the child would gain much of that moral training upon which Ruskin set such store, including disciplines in attentive observation, repeated effort, obedience in carrying out instructions, and the deep-seated satisfaction and

self-respect which comes from accomplishment. Here, too, in relation to these practical activities would come most of that knowledge of natural history which would start the child on the road to realization of his place in God's world.

Higher education would be of two kinds. Its character is suggested by two sentences: "Shopmen are to be educated in shops; craftsmen, including artists, in the schools of their craft."*

"A youth is sent to our Universities, not to be apprenticed to a trade, nor even always to be advanced in a profession; but, always, to be made a gentleman and a scholar."*

Ruskin assumed that the world will always have its large mass of simple folk who are capable of doing only the simpler kind of work; at the other end of the social scale are the members of an aristocracy of talent, from whom are recruited the leaders and professional men. Between the two would be the skilled workers. For these skilled workers there would be schools of a technical nature in which "first the principles of their special business may be perfectly taught, and whatever higher learning, and cultivation of the faculties for receiving and giving pleasure, may be properly joined with that labour,"* for example, a school of agriculture, of mercantile seamanship, a school of metal-work "at the head of which will be, not the ironmasters, but the goldsmiths."

The university, however, is primarily a school of literature, training modes of philosophic and imaginative thought. "The object of university teaching is to form your conceptions—not to acquaint you with arts, nor sciences,—that you may in peace, in leisure, in calm of disinterested contemplation be enabled to conceive rightly the laws of nature, and the destinies of Man."*

Ruskin's university training is therefore a liberal course of study with emphasis upon a "judicious involution" of its studies.

**Arrows of the Chace.* XXXIV, p. 556.
**Lectures on Art, sec.* 2. XX, p. 18.
**Ibid.*, sec. 5. XX, pp. 21-22.
**Eagle's Nest,* sec. 18. XXII, p. 135.

As postscript to a letter written in response to an inquiry about his ideas of how art might be related to the existing university curriculum,* Ruskin set up a comprehensive final examination for the student of botany to demonstrate his conception of "judicious involution." The examination would consist of ten parts beginning with "State the habit of such and such a plant" and ending with "Describe its influence upon civilization." Of all these questions, he said, there is not one which does not test the student in other studies than botany; and he proceeded to point out that involved were geography, drawing, mathematics, chemistry, political economy, and (in four of the parts) literature.

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In America, we have lately come to realize that the disturbances to life and thought in Victorian England which stimulated such critics as Carlyle, Mill, Arnold, and Ruskin foreshadowed in many of their essential qualities the problems of our own times. Because education, by its nature, tends to reflect changes in social ideals, the questioning, critical attitude of the present time toward education is reminiscent of the national atmosphere in which Ruskin lived. It would appear, then, that whatever interest there may be in Ruskin's ideas on education lies chiefly in their relation to contemporary thought and that they may best be interpreted in the light of the current trend.

Criticism of education today tends to ally itself with one or the other of two points of view representative of rival claims as to whether education should be primarily concerned with providing free scope for the fullest development of the individual in accordance with his own capacities and interests or with shaping the individual to the existing pattern of life. Their contemporary labels are Progressivism and Essentialism.

Progressivism has for nearly a generation aggressively sought to bring about a thorough-going reorganization of the whole educative process. Although the movement is still associated in the public mind with private schools, its influence upon practices in our public schools, especially at the elementary level, has

The Arts as a Branch of Education: a Letter to the Rev. F. Temple (September 25, 1857). XVI, pp. 453-4.

grown steadily.

In a very real sense, the founder of Progressivism was John Dewey. His *School and Society,* an exposition of the organization and objectives of an experimental school (1896-1904) at the University of Chicago, has been the most influential statement of Progressive doctrine. It we compare Ruskin's ideas about elementary education with those expressed in *School and Society* we find some rather significant similarities.

Dewey, like Ruskin, organized his school on the basis of activities which reproduce or resemble adult occupational activities of an era prior to the advent of modern industrialism. School took on the informal nature of a busy shop, and knowledge was acquired in relation to such activities as, for example, the making of cloth. Even the three R's were subordinated to the activity program. The school consciously focussed its attention upon the individual child rather than upon the material to be learned, on the principle that learning should not be imposed upon the individual but must grow out of his own felt needs.

Thus, as the student of Ruskin, grown aware of the prophetic character of his thinking, might have been led to expect, there are resemblances in Ruskin's plan of education suggestive of the three outstanding characteristics of Progressive practice: the activity or project method, with its principle of learning by doing, by first-hand experience; the realistic or practical curriculum, providing skills and knowledge which can be comprehended by the child and immediately applied; individualized instruction, the child-centered school.

But these are very largely similiarities of educational method. Further examination, especially if it be examination of objectives and of underlying conceptions of man and society, reveals a very real difference. This contrast can best be explained if we turn to the earlier reform movement out of which Progressivism evolved. This was a movement, stemming from the teachings of Rousseau, which was shaped during the nineteenth century by such famous educators as Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Froebel. It was this "New Education" which Dewey converted into Progressive education in the early years of the twentieth century.

The primary characteristic common to the thought of all of these earlier reformers was their sense of the significance of the individual. Their educational theory drew its support and took its shape from a conception of the individual which was based upon an intuitive idealism, religious in its recognition of a controlling super-human Power from which human life gains its peculiar importance and optimistic in its assumption that everything, including man, is good "as it comes from the hands of the author of nature." It was a theory which added its force to the rising tide of democracy, with its ideal to extend social rights and privileges to all. From these assumptions the New Education developed its doctrine of natural growth; in that doctrine are the origins of the activity method, the realistic curriculum, and the child-centered school.

Shortly after the middle of the century, however, materialistic forces growing out of the Industrial Revolution, especially science, came into conflict with the intuitivism upon which these reformers had relied. Quite generally, where that conflict did not lead to loss of religious faith, there was a disposition to avoid facing the issues involved. In either case there resulted a preoccupation with the material aspects of life at the expense of the theoretical. Education followed the current and became a science; interest in Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Froebel was concentrated not upon their philosophies but upon their principles and methods.

It was left to Dewey to accommodate nineteenth century democratic idealism and the doctrine of natural growth to the twentieth century preoccupation with science, and so to bring to the fore a philosophic support for the Progressive methods which evolved from those of the New Education. Dewey made that adjustment by rejecting everything which cannot be made subject to scientific analysis. He is essentially materialistic. He has no interest in first causes or ultimate ends; he is content to take Life for granted, and concerns himself only with living. His goal of individual self-realization is to be accomplished by the effective use of intelligence; the mind is an instrument which has evolved through trial-and-error methods of experience into an effective tool which can be further improved by intelligent use. But intelligence must not be hampered by supposedly ab-

solute values or by fixed goals. Growth itself is the only goal, the only moral "end."

Dewey's fundamental position is, then, the antithesis of Ruskin's. It is true that their social goals—for Dewey is as much a social reformer as ever was Ruskin—are much alike, for both work toward a co-operative social order in which all men may participate according to ability. They would approach their goals, however, by very different routes. Whereas Dewey, and the Progressivists, holding to the democratic idealism of the New Education, disposed of the clash between revelations of science and the intuitive conception of the significance of the individual by rejecting the latter in favor of a materialistic philosophy of experimentalism, Ruskin held firmly to his faith in a Supreme Being and the altruistic ethics of Christianity. Consequently, in spite of whatever similarities there may seem to be in their methods of instruction or in their organization of the school, Ruskin cannot be considered a pioneer Progressivist.

But what relation may Ruskin's ideas have to those of the New Education before it lost its religious faith? The most respected biographical and critical studies of Ruskin, with a natural tendency to emphasize the forward-looking qualities of Ruskin's social thought, imply that Ruskin's educational ideas are in line with those of the Rousselian tradition.* Actually, however, Ruskin was only partially in sympathy with New Education thought.

He had their conception of the significance of the individual, based on intuitive idealism. He had their democratic interest in bringing all men actively into the social order. He had their desire to make education universal. But he had no sympathy with their assumption that human nature is innately good, needing only opportunity for release of its powers through natural growth. Man's God-given capacities are limited, said Ruskin, and potentially good or bad, depending upon how they are developed. To come to their best maturity they must be trained by deliberate and constant exercise. As he fought the materialism of science, he opposed the nineteenth century democratic ideal-

*Ruskin has left no evidence, in his books or his letters, that he was acquainted with the educational ideas of any of these reformers.

ism which emphasized liberty and quality. Instead of the selfish demand for opportunity and 'rights,' he emphasized responsibilities and obligations. By placing themselves in position to deserve things, he thought, men will inevitably acquire what democracy demands as rights. Thus, in effect, he would guarantee that for which the democratic ideal was striving: security of opportunity for self-realization, for the full development of the powers of the individual, and active participation, in accordance with capacity, in the significant affairs of society. It would be gained, however, through inculcation of altruistic virtues, through discipline and self-control, rather than through natural unfolding of innate goodness.

Opposition to the growing influence of Progressivist practices is of long standing, but it has only recently shown signs of becoming organized. In 1935 the late Michael Demiaskevich pointed out that there is an opposing school of educational thought, to which he gave the name, 'Essentialist.'* Three years later there was formed an Essentialist Committee for the Advancement of American Education, initiating an Essentialist movement of counter-reform. The spokesman for this committee is W. C. Bagley, who says, "The Essentialist emphasizes the basic significance of the accumulated experience of the race, and affirms the chief concern of education to be the transmission to each generation of the most important lessons that have come out of this experience."* In pointed contrast to Progressivist doctrine, the Essentialist would establish a community of culture through a standardized and systematic program of studies and activities; he would develop the capacity of self-discipline through imposed disciplines, requiring of the pupil effort devoted often "to the mastery of materials the significance of which must be taken at the time on faith." Thus, in his view, education is a form of training rather than of self-development.

The Essentialist traces his educational philosophy to "Socrates and the Socratics." He would bring back into the foreground of educational thought the conception of education first recorded by Plato and adapt educational procedures, in the light of modern knowledge and modern conditions, to the classical ideal.

*Michael Demiaskevich, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, (New York, 1935), p. 147.

*W. C. Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," *Classical Journal*, XXXIV (March, 1939) pp. 326-44.

In the basic structure of Ruskin's view of education, there is close similarity to that of the Essentialist's, much closer than to the thought of the New Education or Progressivism. It is a resemblance all the more pointed because Ruskin drew heavily upon Plato in the exposition of his social ideals, and of his ideas on education as well.

Ruskin had much of Plato's belief in absolute values of the good, the true, and the beautiful, though Ruskin would expect men to achieve recognition of the ultimate Goodness, or God, through development of the moral sense rather than by way of the intellect, as did Plato. In Ruskin's conception of the ideal social order we find the Platonic goal of justice, of every man in his place, and the same extensive governmental regulation of society administered by a relatively small group of the intellectual elite. Ruskin accepts the Platonic assumption that individual capacities are fixed or limited at birth and that these are to be trained by social pressures.

Consequently, Ruskin's plan of elementary education has significant resemblances to that of Plato, as outlined in the *Laws*. Plato would defer intellectual education until after the child had become habituated to established standards of thought and action, an habituation fixed by a program of training which permitted no deviation from prescribed disciplines or from a rigidly censored body of knowledge. It would be a program composed almost wholly of activities which combined physical, moral, and intellectual education in exercises emphasizing practical preparation for the duties of citizenship, and especially for future military service. It would be a program universally compulsory at the elementary stage; later, on the basis of proved ability, selection would be made of the few who are to receive advanced training which would fit them to become the governors of society.

When we turn to the Essentialist's point of view we find differences which set him off from both Ruskin and Plato. It is a difference primarily of procedures, and of organization of the educative program. For the Essentialist holds rather closely to the traditional view of education, as it has come down through the centuries. He clings to the formal organization of subject-matter, to the emphasis upon intellectual education, and to vicarious rather than first-hand experience. He rejects not only the "child-centered school" of the Progressivist but also the practical

curriculum and the "activity method," except perhaps at the lowest level of the elementary school.

That traditional view, intellectualistic and aristocratic, is classical in its origin; but it derives from the Plato of the *Republic* and from modifications of Platonic thought made by Aristotle, who preferred the cultural rather than the practical objective. Ruskin's independent spirit, however, led him directly to the otherwise disregarded *Laws*, a much more practical treatise than the utopian *Republic*. In the *Laws* Plato's social view is much broader. His society is, in a sense, an upper middle-class democracy, and his program of elementary education is one made suitable for all citizens, whereas in the *Republic* he had been interested mainly in higher education suitable only for the intellectual aristocrat. That combination of Progressivist practice and Essentialist structure which we have already noted in Ruskin's plan of education is therefore to be found suggested in the *Laws*.

We must not conclude, however, that Ruskin was merely a disciple of Plato, for Ruskin's plan of education is suffused with a spirit which is essentially Ruskinian. In Plato's society the significance of the individual is lost in a state conceived as an end in itself; but Ruskin, by depending upon the individual's consciousness of responsibility to others, managed to maintain the dignity of the individual life.

Thus, in summary, Ruskin's plan of education takes its character from the fusion of two qualities: the first is its democratic idealism, resembling that of early New Education thought, which finds significance in the life of every individual and seeks to provide a way by which each can share actively in the life of society; the second is classical authoritarianism, which would habituate the individual to established standards. These are not antagonistic, for in Ruskin's plan the established standards would be the Christian altruistic virtues, which draw their vitality from a faith in man as the son of God.

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As long as our age continues to be dominated by the utilitarian and materialistic spirit which has characterized the advance of industrialism, as long as democratic idealism maintains its

emphasis upon self and self-expression, Ruskin's proposals for the reform of education will attract no sympathetic interest.

However, materialistic objections to Ruskin's plan can not be pressed too far, for there is in Ruskin's social idealism a fundamental truth which lies too closely beneath the surface. Although it may be true that the Christian theology of a century ago must needs be interpreted anew, it cannot be said that the twentieth century has discarded Christian ethics. Moreover, Ruskin faced with courageous logic problems which the democratic and scientific mood of the last hundred years has thus far preferred to ignore. He would recall all men to the realization that living involves the obligation of working, that the greatest satisfactions are gained by those whose activity exercises not hand alone, nor head alone, but hand, head, and heart in one organic, integrated expression of individual vitality. Furthermore, Ruskin faced squarely the problem of differences in individual capacities without sacrificing personal dignity. Democratic idealism has long sought to minimize the fact that individuals differ, especially intellectually. But as the complexities of life multiply, the trend is unmistakeably toward Ruskin's position that we must frankly recognize the necessity of adjusting our social—even our political—arrangements on the principle of tools to him who can use them, in harmony with the larger principle of social justice.

There are innumerable signs pointing to the conclusion that the age of science has already passed its zenith, and that a reaction has set in against the tendencies which have characterized the age. Collapse of the economic structure in 1929 broke the spell of the wholly materialistic life. The last decade has shown a marked movement away from *laissez-faire* in government, rugged individualism, and the older democratic ideals. There has been a return of intuitive idealism on the high intellectual level of the physical sciences. There is evidence of an increasing desire to re-create discipline, order, and national vitality within the framework of democracy for the purpose of preserving that democracy.

The recent emergence of the Essentialist movement in education may be taken as another sign of the reactionary spirit of our

times. Ruskin, in effect, anticipated this spirit and the Essentialist's revival of the classical view of the function of education. He sought to check the revolutionary social trend of his own time at exactly the point from which, since then, the Progressivists have sought to develop it.

The program of the Essentialist, however, follows Ruskin's at a great distance. Still under the influence of educational traditionalism, he has as yet made only partial adaptation of an aristocratic, intellectualistic system of education to a social order vastly more inclusive in theory and steadily growing more inclusive in fact. It would seem, then, that Ruskin has more nearly achieved that balance of responsibilities and rights, towards which the Essentialists needs must aspire, by constructing his scheme of education in such manner that it effectively combines the two essential objectives: (1) social justice, adapted to a social order in which all men may actively participate; (2) the formation of character, conceived in terms of Christian ethics.

Whether such a plan of education as Ruskin's could be made to function in America today is an open question. It would depend, chiefly, it would seem, upon whether we are ready to make practical application of the rules of human conduct and the law of social relationships to which a world, which still likes to call itself Christian, clings tenaciously as expressive of man at his noblest, but which—strangely enough—it has never tried.

VITA

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